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ABSTRACT

Situational and personal barriers to the educational goals of nonwhite youths in Florida appear to be caused by a variety of subtle and complex factors deeply rooted in the environment of the youths: (1) cultural determinism; (2) attitudes of resistance and antagonism on the part of white teachers and counselors; (3) lack of information on the part of nonwhite teachers and counselors; (4) failure of blacks to acquire needed cognitive skills; (5) unavailability of high level curriculums in segregated or predominantly black schools; (6) inadequate guidance service; (7) delayed or deferred decision making; and (8) lack of intelligent, aggressive concern by many black families. To help young blacks, teachers and counselors must recognize diversity as a genuine characteristic of blacks. Parents must take more responsibility for children's discipline and teacher cooperation. Black counselors must encourage black students to think more seriously about linking short-range activity and long-range goals. Faithful application of these strategies would greatly expand educational opportunities for nonwhite youth, thereby enabling them to more readily take advantage of such personally, educationally and economically rewarding time-shortened degree tools as the CLEP, early admission, advanced placement, and others. (Author/BEF)

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COPING WITH PERSONAL AND SITUATIONAL BARRIERS TO THE EDUCATIONAL GOALS OF NONWHITE YOUTHS IN FLORIDA

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INTRODUCTION

As indicated, my subject is "Coping with Personal and Situational Barriers to the Educational Goals of Nonwhite Youths in Florida." It is limited to those who have aspirations leading to college, graduate and professional schools. A barrier may be thought of as any custom, law, regulation, practice, attitude or value designed to prevent free choice of options based on interplay between aptitudes, abilities, motivations and interests on the one hand and willingness to "pay the price" on the other hand. A personal barrier may be thought of as an internal condition such as limited aptitudes, abilities, achievement, aspirations, and motivations. A situational barrier may be thought of as some condition external to the individual such as laws, customs, counselors, teachers, family, lack of opportunity for self-fulfillment, etc.

Mindful of these definitions, let us spend a bit of time talking about: (1) the background and history of the educational problems of nonwhite youths in Florida, (2) the nature and extent of the problems, and (3) some suggested solutions.

The Negro in slavery, of course, was not a citizen of the United States. The free Negroes, found in every state during the antibellum period, enjoyed some of the privileges of citizens, but generally their rights were severely circumscribed and were never clearly defined before 1857 - if even then. In that year, in the now infamous Dred Scott decision, the United States Supreme Court declared:

> Negroes, free or slave, were not citizens and 'had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.' They were not citizens of the United States simply because they were or had been slaves, but because they were 'beings of an inferior order; and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations.'[1]

Then, there was the period from about 1865-68. During this hectic time, the southern states were frantically writing the wicked Black Codes into law. The overriding purpose of the Black Codes was to establish conclusively the principle of the superiority of whites and the inferiority of blacks, etc.

Still another earth-shaking decision was that of Plessy v. Ferguson, 1898. According to the Supreme Court, laws requiring segregation were a reasonable use of state police power - better known as the "separate but equal" doctrine In applying new subjective, philosophical, moral and ethical criteria to Brown v. Topeka Board of Education, 1954, the Supreme Court concluded:

> segregation with the sanction of law has a tendency to retard the education and mental development of black children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racially integrated school system. It further concluded that separation of races, from an educational standpoint, 'generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.'[2]

And although the famous Brown decision and the 1964 Public Accommodation Law were interventive in intent and nature, they have hardly impacted in such a way as to make a significant difference on the education of blacks generally so far.

The Problem

The results of these conditions have had serious and devastating impact on the educational status of young blacks in Florida - as elsewhere. Based on the record, Florida is one of the most receptive states to time-shortened degree mechanisms. According to the Commissioner of Education, by granting academic credits to students for performance on time-shortened degree tools during the 1974-75 school year, Florida saved six million dollars. The parents of the students also saved three million dollars in direct tuition costs.[3] And although black students were in much greater financial need than white students, only a very few black students were able to take advantage of this opportunity. The seriousness of the problem provided the motivation for this paper.

By and large, the degree of self-fulfillment by the individual usually derives from the nature and extent of the privileges society provides one for exploiting hereditary and predispositional endowments along with environmental opportunities. One of the most formidable barriers to the optimum achievement and adjustment of young blacks in Florida is that of meeting the demands of standardized tests. The medium - typifying the problems of blacks - for discussion will be the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP).

Barriers

The numerous indicators of the wide acceptance of the CLEP suggest that it is a practice whose time has arrive. But in spite of its benefits, it possesses critical challenges to the historically disadvantaged. The limited use of this tool in Florida by nonwhites appears to be a reflection of the national scene. For well-known reasons, ethnic statistics are hard to come by nowadays. But in their study, Grandy and Shea did find 27 institutions awarding CLEP credits to one or more black, Spanish-speaking, or American Indian students in 1973-74. The remaining institutions had no data or did not respond to the item.[4] By and large, the results appear to have been related to traditional values.

One of the main challenges of the CLEP, SAT, ACT, etc., is that the cognition and skills they require appear to be rooted rather directly in the experiences of a typical pre-college curriculum or out-of-school experiences in which equivalent knowledge and skills may be acquired at the interpretive and applicatory levels of mastery. In Florida, the vast majority of black high school students continue to gravitate toward curricula in lower-level, applied arts or other low level studies and activities. These curricula make little pretense at preparing students for competitive college curricular, probably accounting for why so few blacks can exploit acceleration mechanisms.

Sometime ago, the author pointed out that for making satisfactory scores on the entrance battery and teacher grades, fewer than 10 percent of the Florida freshmen entering FAMU had an appropriate combination and level of courses in high school. On the other hand, the directors of admission at the University of Florida and Florida State University report that more than 90 percent of their freshmen usually take the so-called precollege curriculum. The pattern of courses in Schedule I is much more representative of what Florida black high school students take than is the pattern in Schedule II.

SCHEDULE I

THE STUDENT PRESENTING THIS HIGH SCHOOL TRANSCRIPT FAILED TO EARN ANY CLEP HOURS AND MADE ONLY A 1.00 GPA FOR THE FIRST QUARTER, 1973-74, ON A 4-POINT SCALE

SUBJECTS	GRADES	SUBJECTS	GRADES
ENGLISH	D	ENGLISH	D
MATHEMATICS	D	MATHEMATICS	C
PHYSICAL EDUCATION	A	BIOLOGY	D
SCIENCE	C	NATIONAL HISTORY	F
GEOGRAPHY	C	DRIVER EDUCATION	F
ENGLISH	C	HEALTH AND SAFETY	D
WORLD HISTORY	D	ENGLISH	C
AMERICAN HISTORY	B	BUSINESS ENGLISH	D
PHYSICAL EDUCATION	B	JOURNALISM	A
DRIVER EDUCATION	D	GEOMETRY	F
ART	C	AMERICAN GOVERNMENT	C
TYPING	C	CHILD DEVELOPMENT	D
GEORGE STONE	D		

SCHEDULE II

THE STUDENT PRESENTING THE FOLLOWING HIGH SCHOOL TRANSCRIPT, EARNED ALL OF THE CLEP HOURS SHE COULD, AND MADE A 4.00 GPA FOR THE FIRST QUARTER, 1973-74, ON A 4-POINT SCALE

SUBJECTS	GRADES	SUBJECTS	GRADES
ENGLISH	A	U. S. GOVERNMENT	A
ALGEBRA	A	SPANISH	A
CHEMISTRY	A	RAPID WORK	A
WORLD HISTORY	A	ANATOMY-PHYSIOLOGY	B
SPANISH	C+	ENGLISH II, ADVANCE	A
MATH ANALYSIS	A	ALGEBRA II	A
PHYSICS	A	CHEMISTRY	B+
U. S. HISTORY	A	WORLD HISTORY	A
SPANISH	B	SPANISH	C
CALCULUS	A	SPANISH	B
ENGLISH III	A	ECONOMICS	A
MATH ANALYSIS	A	ANATOMY-PHYSIOLOGY	A
PHYSICS	B	CALCULUS	B+
U. S. HISTORY	A	PSYCHOLOGY	A
SPANISH IV	B	SPANISH	B+
CALCULUS	A	RAPID WORK	A
AMERICAN COM.	A	ANATOMY-PHYSIOLOGY	A
SPANISH V	B+	SHAKESPEARE	A
ANATOMY-PHYSIOLOGY	B	PR VIEW	A

It is not being argued that everyone should go to college and take advantage of time-shortened degree mechanisms. It is however being pointed out that blacks who do have such ambitions should utilize appropriate strategies for these purposes. They should weigh seriously the short- and long-range implications of their values and choices; critically assess their strengths and weaknesses; accurately evaluate the opportunities the environment offers them for achieving their goals. Meeting these mandates should more nearly lead to the same kind of excellence in cognitive achievement as many of them now exhibit in football, basketball, baseball, track, marching bands, choirs, shops and homemaking.

Black and white teacher-counselors appear to be yet another barrier to the use of time-shortened degree tools by black students. It is safe to assume that the guidance model employed by counselors is an examplar of their own formal and informal experiences. Although changing, the average black counselor was born in a segregated society and educated in a separate school system, neither of which routinely necessitated nor rewarded the types of competencies and skills required by a typical precollege curriculum. Failing to have these important experiences formally and seldom vicariously, through lack of information, many of them have often counseled black students against taking so-called hard subjects when they could get in college with results from soft courses. A

black assistant dean of admissions at Stanford University has said that he sometimes "felt like crying at some of the high school counseling that black students received in both integrated and segregated schools he has visited around the country."[5]

In an extensive talent search a few years ago for black students interested in entering interracial colleges, Plaut's project was impeded by such factors as (1) reluctance on the part of both students and parents to venture out of the lifelong segregated environment; (2) fear of not being able to meet the comparatively difficult scholastic standards and higher financial costs of interracial colleges; and (3) the influence of parents, principals, teachers, and counselors in favor of the nearby, predominantly Negro college, often their alma maters.[6]

A conference for counselors in Florida was held at Florida A & M University sometime after public school integration. A black counselor related how white counselors in one county tended to misuse test results to reward white counselees and to penalize nonwhite counselees. There were five tests in the admissions battery to the universities. In using the results, many white counselors were inclined to interpret one low score out of five as an oddity when the student was white. When he was black or Spanish-speaking, one low score out of five was used to demonstrate the irrelevancy of the four high scores.

Racism by many white counselors is another classical example of barriers to self-fulfillment by nonwhites. Most of these counselors too were reared in a segregated society and educated in a separate school system both of which at least routinely implied that nonwhites were incapable of coping with the pre-college curriculum, and probably had no right to such aspirations. It is safe to assume therefore that the guidance model employed by these counselors is also an archetype of their own formal and informal experiences. A letter from the mother of a New York City high school senior (name changed) illustrates the kind of guidance model often used for black high school students that can pre-empt them from adequate college preparation:

> In the spring of 1976, James brought home the junior-class schedule for course selection for the academic year 1976-77. He selected religion, English, mathematics, chemistry, Spanish, and American history.... When he went to register in September 1976, he was told that the chemistry class was closed and business survey was substituted in its place by the dean of studies. I called the dean of studies, who after listening to my protest, calmly told me that the course was closed. . . . I composed a mailgram, which I sent to the principal and the dean of studies. As a result, James' schedule was rearranged by the dean to include chemistry.
>
> Chemistry was a prerequisite to the physics course James felt he needed to take during his senior year. If he had not taken the chemistry, the physics course would have been closed to him. If he had taken the business survey course, he would have had to take typing, art, music, or some other non-college preparatory elective during his senior year. The mailgram stressed that James was planning to attend college after high school and requested that he be offered college preparation.

Yet another model is excerpted from a letter the author wrote The Tallahassee Democrat, February 9, 1973. According to it:

> An even more serious problem is unbridled prejudiced and insensitivity on the part of many teachers to the problems and needs of all youngsters. This is best described by a classical example. There is a black freshman at the University of South Florida now. In ninth grade she tested out satisfactorily for the college prep curriculum. Nevertheless, she was placed in the special education class. When her parents intervened, they were informed by the counselor and principal that they had put the child in this class because they reasoned the child would be 'happier' among her own people since most of them were in the special class. This cruel action was reversed summarily. It is very probable though if the child had not taken the college prep curriculum, it is likely she would not have made the cutoff score on the entrance battery. And if she had not made the score, she would hardly be at USF today, simply because of the arbitrary and stereotyped decision of an apparently unduly biased counselor and principal.
>
> No doubt, this incident can be multiplied thousands of times. Therefore, this report should serve as a warning to the parents of nonwhite and poor white children that they must become more knowledgeable about the school program also more actively and positively concerned about what the school is doing to and for their children.

Although the above models emphasized situational barriers, they cut across personal barriers. But one or two models of more clearly personal barriers are in order.

A noted black psychiatrist, recently related his conversation with a black counselor, who told him, "Studying for them (blacks) is 'uncool,' and they don't let anybody else study." He also reported on one of his own clients.

"One 14-year-old youngster who was receiving psychiatric treatment confirmed the problem when he explained that his buddies made him feel like a turncoat because he was studying college algebra with all the 'whites' while they were studying applied math - a math for low achievers."[7]

Unfortunately, the above sentiment appears to be true among entirely too many black youngsters. It provoked Ebony magazine to editorialize, "We notice increasingly an attitude on the part of many young blacks that at once disappoints and gives cause for concern. That attitude is one bordering on scorn for learning, contempt for achievement and disdain for the pursuit of excellence."[8]

The contention has been that the above problems are representative of the plethora of barriers faced by young blacks in the pursuit of their personal, social and educational goals.

Attacking the Barriers

Assuming the validity of the problems, what can be done to help young blacks meet the challenges of the barriers? What can they do themselves? It is likely to require, even, radical changes by many to get the job done.

First the white teacher-counselors must be willing to recognize diversity as a genuine characteristic of blacks. Class status, morality, aspiration, motivation, capability, and cognitive style all vary from student to student, regardless of race. While refraining from projecting ready failure

for black students, teacher-counselors must accept the high aspirations of these students as worthy and legitimate goals. White teacher-counselors must also learn to ask themselves if they are counseling black students in a fair and objective manner. Counselors must also continue to question their value systems and gain an awareness of the circumstances by which those values were acquired. Finally, white counselors, once geared to the expectation that black youngsters can succeed, must set truly high goals for and help them to achieve their goals.

The home responsibility as an element of this change agent is that it must send the youngster to school with self-discipline in general and with an acceptable orientation toward teachers, authority and education in particular. Teachers will have to be given more cooperation, not because they necessarily deserve it, but because that appears to be the only way the educational process can work.

More than ever, black counselors must encourage black youngsters to think much more seriously about how to link their short-range activities with their long-range goals. Youngsters must be helped to understand more full the meaning of and the demands of an achieving, a competitive, mobile and credentialing society. Specifically, young blacks with goals leading to college, graduate and professional schools must acquire the

competencies most easily gained in a typical precollege curriculum. These accomplishments may often require black counselors to draw on guidance models which are uncommon to their own backgrounds.

Black parents must engage in step-by-step monitoring of the guidance services provided their children by the school. It may often involve strategies of challenge or confrontation, as in the two cases presented. But challenge is paramount when it is fully realized that early decision-making inevitably affects long-range goals and vice versa. Sowell, a brilliant black economist, stresses the value of confrontation when necessary. Based on his experiences in public schools in Charlotte, N. C., and New York City, he tells young blacks they unfortunately, ". . . must fight to get what you need and want. But you must be good to do so." And interestingly enough, he found some white teachers who were willing to help him once they discovered he really was serious and wanted help.[9] The value of confrontation can be validated by the experience of most blacks "who have made it" in spite of their environment.

An important catalyst for change for blacks is the use of the Judo technique in the process of coping with educational challenges. It utilizes the other's resistance to change as a tool for change. According to the authors:

> The subject was being suspended by a principal who was noted for stressing the importance of class attendance and for believing quite firmly that a student could not keep up with his studies without faithful attendance; therefore, suspension would cause his failure for the entire year.
>
> The therapist realized that the boy's anger with the principal afforded a lever for change. 'She was then to point out to the boy that if during his suspension . . . he should do as well or even better on his own than when he attended class, the principal would be very red-faced and embarrassed . . . suggesting that it might be for the best if he did not 'do too well,' and thereby save the principal's face. The mother subsequently reported to the therapist that when he heard this, her son's face lit up with a diabolical grin and revenge shone in his eyes. He had found a way to gain retribution, and it mattered little that it would require his buckling down to work. In a follow-up session the mother reported that her son had thrown himself into the schoolwork 'with a vengeance' and was beginning to get better grades than ever before.'[10]

Indeed, blacks have effectively used the Judo technique in extracurricular activities. For years they have been kept out of organized baseball, football, track, etc., because: "The cannot learn the plays; they are too unstable; they cannot communicate; whites won't pay to see blacks play," ad infinitum. However, in just 30 short years after Jackie Robinson broke the color line, attendance is proportionately better than ever and almost all of the honored records in these sports are currently held by blacks. So they now need to apply the Judo techniques to other occupations. With a comparable system

of opportunity, featuring early identification, adequate motivation, recognition and reward, who can say they could not demonstrate the same kind of comparative excellence in the sciences, languages, mathematics, engineering, law, medicine, aviation, business, teaching and other honored professions? Application of these strategies should greatly expand the educational opportunities of black youths, thus, enabling them to take advantage of time-shortened degree mechanisms such as CLEP, SAT, ACT, etc.

Summary and Conclusions

This has been a presentation on situational and personal barriers to the educational goals of nonwhite youth in Florida. It has been revealed that the barriers appear to be caused by a variety of subtle and complex factors deeply rooted in the environment of the youth: (1) cultural determinism, (2) attitudes of resistance and antagonism on the part of white teachers and counselors, (3) lack of information on the part of nonwhite teachers and counselors, (4) failure of blacks to acquire needed cognitive skills, (5) unavailability of high level curriculums in segregated or predominantly black schools, (6) inadequate guidance service, (7) delayed or deferred decision making, and (8) lack of intelligent, aggressive concern by many black families.

What can counselors do to help young blacks break through the barriers they face? What can their parents do to help them? What can they, themselves, do to improve their educational opportunities? Several strategies for attacking the barriers have been suggested. It is felt that faithful application of these strategies would greatly expand educational opportunities for nonwhite youth, thereby, enabling them to more readily take advantage of such personally, educationally and economically rewarding time-shortened degree tools as the CLEP, early admission, advanced placement, etc.

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